



The South India CHURCHMAN

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The Magazine of the Church of South India

● SEPTEMBER 1994

MID-DECADE REFLECTIONS

ECUMENICAL DECADE
CHURCHES IN
SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN
1988-1998



CONTENTS

A Chance to Change	Page 1
REFLECTIONS ON MINISTRY	
Remembering Bishop Richard Lipp	2
Ecumenical Decade - Women's Challenges and Responses	3
The Role of Women in a Christian Home	6
Role of Women in Restoring Eco Balance	9
Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, a Report	11
Churches in Solidarity with Women Mid-decade Reflections	13
Women in Dialogue	16
Women's Fellowship, North Kerala	18

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SEPTEMBER 1994

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25 Years Ago!

LAY WOMEN

If I have hardly mentioned lay women it is because 'laymen' must always include lay women. Lay women are not very much in evidence in the Councils of the Church, chiefly because of the selfishness and the self-assertiveness of the Indian Christian male, but it does not mean that they do not count in real Christian service. In fact, one of the most hopeful sign is the work among women for which we must thank those devoted persons, Our Women Missionaries, and their Indian Colleagues, who seem to work in such close co-operation and harmony; they cannot however, accomplish their work without the kindly guidance, the whole-hearted assistance and the enthusiastic co-operation of parochial clergy and their paid colleagues. But much remains to be done, particularly of developing voluntary leadership among Indian Women.

—Churchman 1957

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A Chance to Change



The Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women is seen as a follow up of the U.N. Decade for Women (1975 to 1985) which in spite of its limited contribution did not address itself to the churches nor did it adequately challenge structures that diminish the humanity of women in the society.

This decade offered the churches an opportunity to create a ministry of empowering, sharing and healing of women in society and to restructure themselves so as to be able to facilitate the participation and leadership of women and all other marginalised groups.

In other words, ten years of time was given to the churches and the women groups to sort out the things that would help them to establish a new community of men and women. At this stage, after five years a simple question that everybody would like to ask is — has anything concrete been done during these five years?

When the decade was declared the churches were urged to take it as a chance to plan specific ways by which to recognise the leadership potential of women, their contribution not only as regular churchgoers but also as participants in the framing of theological formulations and the ministry of the church and in its administrative and decision-making structures. A great task indeed. This requires the cooperation of the people-men and women - who are at the helm of affairs.

The churches are also urged to develop the gifts and skills of women through exposure programmes, through training and through intensive involvement of women at various levels. This, taken as an objective, addresses to the immediate needs of women's emancipation. Some of these lofty ideals, guidelines, objectives get stuck up at the offices; they are seen only on the papers and discussed at the elitistic forums. Seldom they percolate to the levels of the local congregations.

Besides, churches were also asked to recognise their diaconal responsibilities for deeper involvement in the life

struggles of women e.g. dowry, legal status, abuse of medical technology, exploitation of women's sexuality etc. This social dimension of churches ministry cannot be ignored. In fact, the emphasis is on the churches solidarity with the women and the problems confronting them. But, to leave it to the churches alone, placing women at the receiving end, would mean weakening women's position further. Hence women of churches are urged to become more aware of and involve themselves closely with the growing secular women's movements and the issues they highlight. This awareness is very important. It is difficult to say how many women do really know about this decade. It should be a mass movement where the participation is spontaneous.

The decade appeals to women for a greater ecumenical participation, going beyond denominational loyalties, reaching out to women of all denominations/and to women of other faiths and ideologies so as to provide alternatives to the present situation of hostility and suspicion in which they live.

This sets a mandate. A well planned programmes, where people are involved have to be conceived. The official meetings and the resolutions will not be sufficient for such onerous task. Women, for that matter men, do need proper information, inspiration and exposure to the realities of the day.

Here is a chance to change — Changing the oppressive structures; empowering women to challenge all that stands in the way of their progress in the global community, their country and their church. Five years have already been spent. It is time to take stock of the present position of women in church and society; it is time to evaluate the programmes that are being implemented during these five years and study the progress so far made. All said and done, this decade-now only five years-demands radical changes in the attitude of women and men otherwise this will be yet another missed chance.

— DASS BABU

Remembering Bishop Richard Lipp

I had the privilege of visiting Bishop Richard Lipp and Mrs. Lipp when I was in Europe last year. I spent sometime with the former Bishop of North Kerala Diocese, an inspiring experience. Little did I suspect that he will pass into God's eternal presence so soon.

Bishop Lipp was born on 8.4.1908 and died of a heart attack on 24.6.1994. Eighty-six years of consecrated life and ministry. He looked physically so healthy a year ago. He himself prepared a special Malabar Curry for me in a way of specially honouring a guest from Kerala. He was a pious and faithful Bishop like the old Poly Carp of Rome.

As we thanks God for the Bishop's life, I would like to share with the readers a few insights that I have learnt from his life.

1. A Missionary, Prepared for Service in the Global Church :

Bishop Lipp served the diocese of North Kerala and the CSI for 31 years, first as a missionary and then as a Bishop. Apart from uniting and consolidating the diocese which had diverse traditions, he initiated the Nettur Polytechnic NTTF, with Swiss resources, now an outstanding institution in South India for technical training, originally meant mainly for the benefit of the dalith youth.

KNH was his brain child. He asked the German youth worker in the diocese Mr. Kolle on his return to home country, to organise sponsorship programmes which the kind Bomman picked up with great success. Starting with five sponsorships, KNH is now an internationally renowned institution for child care whose first chairman was Bishop Lipp himself.

It was he who initiated the programme of higher studies in theology for young Indian pastors in Germany. He challenged an youth conference that he addressed during a furlough, with this idea. This writer was the first beneficiary, in 1958.

Latter on when Lipp was invited to become Bishop of South Kerala he graciously declined to accept the position, claiming that it was time an Indian was elected

to Bishopric in the CSI. Knowing where to say 'no' and giving up positions of power were signs of his spiritual integrity and moral calibre.

With the advice of Bishop Newbegin, he served the Australian Church for some years before retiring in Germany. It is a matter of great satisfaction to us to know that Bishop Newbegin was present and spoke at the memorial service in Germany on the 6th of July.

2. A Minister prepared for suffering for Christ's sake:

I learnt from him, that the Bishop's Office in the C.S.I. has always been one of undeserved suffering and unjust persecution. I vividly recall him humourously narrating that the most tense part of the Bishop's work — day was 11 a.m. when the postman arrived. He had to open the day's mail, an innocuous thing to do. But for him it brought moments of uncertainty and tension about what the mail might bring; lawyers' notices, threats of various kinds, news of fights in congregation? I had imagined that such problems are a recent development in the CSI. Apparently things were not very different then. It is of some comfort, though of little relief, that our forefathers in faith had greater sufferings to bear. Bishop Lipp's sufferings did bear fruit in terms of greater unity and understanding in the diocese.

As a German citizen he was interned during the war, separated from his family. It seems that when a group of Germans was transferred to another camp, he developed appendicitis and was operated in the Madras General Hospital. Once healed, he had no ordinary clothes to wear except his pyjamas. The Hindu nurses took pity on him, made a collection, bought him a set of dress, that he could travel even as P.O.W., in decent clothing!

More recently he devoted all his time with deep devotion and great affection to look after his sickly wife. In fact, those who saw them in recent times thought that she might precede him in to the kingdom. She bore the news of her husband's death, herself sick in the same hospital, with courage of faith, equal to his. She is now under the expert and personal care of her doctor son in Suessen.

Continue on page No. 8

Ecumenical Decade — Women's Challenges and Responses

MRS. T. KRPAVENI PRAKASARAO, *Vijayawada*

This decade, as we all know, is the Ecumenical Decade of **CHURCHES IN SOLIDARITY WITH WOMEN**. To know what our challenges are during this decade, we have to know something about the decade itself?

The World Council of Churches has declared this decade i.e. from 1988-98 as the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in solidarity with women. This decade is the result of age-long struggle of women. The pre-history of this will go back to 1948, when a woman, Ms. Sarah Chako from India, evidently from Kerala, presented a report on the 'Status of Women in the Church' at the first World Council of Churches Assembly in Amsterdam. 'In 1949 a commission on the Life and work of women in the Church was created'. In 1954 a new department was created in World Council of Churches and it was called the department of the 'Cooperation of men and women in the church and society'.

'In 1974, the sub-unit on Women in the Churches and Society convened a world consultation on discrimination against women.'

'In 1975, in the 5th Assembly of the World Council of Churches held at Nairobi, the plenary session was given to Women's issues and the Assembly voted to study the processes on community of women and men in the Churches.'

In 1981, an International conference was organised in Scheffield on the topic, 'the Web of oppression'. In the same year, the World Council of Churches agreed that women make over half of the constituents of the member churches and therefore, the principle of partnership of men and women means equal participation.

'In 1983 at Vancouver, for the first time in the history of World Council of Churches Assembly, one-third of the delegates were women', and we are proud that the then General Secretary, Miss Suguna Devasundaram represented the CSI Women's Fellowship in World Council of Churches Assembly.

This is how women's struggle over the ages took a shape. I am giving you this brief history of the Women's Struggle at the World Council of Churches level. But we know that there are countless number of struggles at the local level in all Churches. Apart from this struggle in the Church, secular women outside the church all over the world have been continuing their struggle for peace and justice to women which resulted in the United Nations declaring 1975 as the International Year of the Women and 1975-85 as the Women's Decade.

The one pertinent question the women at the helm of affairs have been asking throughout, is 'What do you women want?' It is a question most of us are asked even today. Do we know what we want? What is it we want and what is it we are struggling for? At once we get a question, that, in spite of the fact that women form the majority in the Church, why is it that they have not found place in the administration? Yes. As feminist Biblical scholar, Elizabeth Schussler writes in her article on 'The Invisibility of Women in the Church'. 'Women are not only the silent majority in the Church but they are the silenced majority'. Over centuries, Women in the Church are silenced, mis-quoting the comments of St. Paul in his Epistles, about women 'totally misunderstanding his own attitude to women in the Church, not realising that the negative remarks at women were meant to minimise the pagan cultic-oriented behaviour of women within the life and witness of the Christian community in certain local congregations of the early Church' as our former moderator Rt. Rev. Dr. Victor Premasagar said in his message to the All India Council of Christian women. Therefore, it is true that part of our struggle is for equal opportunities. But that is definitely not all. Then what is it we want?

Scriptures have been read and re-read, searched and re-searched. Theologians have explored the subject with a re-vision, and finally it had to be agreed without any doubt, that, the WOMAN, who is created equally in God's

image as man and who has been hitherto oppressed and humiliated, is to have the same dignity and integrity as the man. Yes, what we ask for is the human dignity with which we are created—in the likeness of God Himself?

Therefore it was felt all over that the women, the millions and millions of them all over the world, need to be conscientised of their dignity and integrity in Christ. Though this awareness-creating process has been initiated, it is found that the development is very slow. Therefore, it was felt that the Church should take the responsibility of helping the women to face their problems and sustain their dignity, integrity and have a better life. The result of this thought is the reason why the WCC decided to launch the Ecumenical Decade (1988-98) of Churches in solidarity with women.

The priorities and purposes set for the Decade are :

1. Women's full participation in church and community life.
2. Recognising women's perspectives and commitments to justice, peace and integrity of creation.
3. Affirming women's decisive contribution in theology and spirituality.

To realise the above priorities, the churches are urged to act in solidarity with women by :

1. Ensuring the participation of women in various ministries including leadership in the church and community.
2. Working with women in overcoming social barriers.
3. Searching for ways and means to empower local women to continue to develop their own strategies and power.
4. Helping local women and men to become aware of women and women's concerns in different areas of the world.

Therefore, we know that this Decade is not just the Women's Decade but it is the Decade of the Churches, where women and men are equal partners.

Women's full participation means the presence of women in all the ministries of the Church including administration and ordained ministry, and sharing of power and resources in the church and community. This is the first challenge to us, women. We know from Gen. 1:27 that God created human beings as male and female, in His image, giving them equal responsibility of tending and ruling the rest of the creation. We also know from

St. Paul's letter to the Galatians 3:28 that in Christ there is no difference, neither male nor female, but we are all one. Then why is it, that when the question of sharing power comes, both men and women feel very uncomfortable and embarrassed, and finally women drop out-or subdued? It is because, as Ms. Boonmee Julkiree says, 'God's image in women is obscured and women feel that they are still in the tomb and covered with the stone not realising that the stone is already removed and woman who is part of the body of Christ is liberated.'

For example, in response to the priorities set by the WCC for Decade, we are fortunate that the Church of South India has resolved in principle to set apart 25% of membership to women in the synod. But what is happening in practice? During the last synod of 1992, few women were elected, fewer still have attended the synod and a very few if not none have taken active part in the deliberations. Dear sister, should we not do justice when we are asked for full participation and an opportunity is given? This is a challenge even to the participants of this quadrennial. Participation does not mean more attendance. What is our response to this challenge?

Now, we know that there is an unbelievable potential in our rural women. Our problem and challenge is to mobilise and empower them so that they can be equal partners and share the power and responsibilities in this church and community. Our job is to educate them and help them to remove the obstacles that prevent them from fully participating in the Church. How many of us know of the VELCOM (Vision for Equipping Local Congregations in Mission) program introduced by the Church of South India in our local churches? What is our role in that mission? Our CSI women's Fellowship has responded to this challenge and helped us to organise leadership training camps for women. Such trainings have to be continued at all levels. Tell our women, that they have power in Christ. Tell them of the instances where Jesus, during His earthly ministry had upheld the women. Tell them about the women of the early Church. Tell them how even St. Paul appraised them as the Co-workers in God's ministry. Tell them of the women, St. Paul mentions in the 16th Chapter of his letter to the Romans. Dr. Christopher Dorai Singh, in his theme addresses at one of the quadrennials, said women are yoked with God in his ministry and that they are the powerhouses of the Church. We have this tremendous responsibility of conscientising our women and empowering them to shoulder the great task ahead of all of us.

The second priority set for the decade is 'Recognising Women's perspective and commitment to Peace, Justice

and Integrity of creation'. What is Peace, Justice and Integrity in the present context?

We are created in the image of God. Therefore it is imperative that we, male and female, equally reflect the divine character, and identity. Both male and female are created to govern the rest of the creation and care for it. So the relationship between God and human being (Women and Men), between Man and Woman and the creation, is the integrity of creation. When men and women uphold each other's dignity and live in harmony with the rest of the creation, peace and justice will prevail. During the last Synod, with the theme 'Good news to all creation', it was very clearly brought to light, the responsibility of men and women to preserve God's creation and to protect it. We, women, have a specific role to play in this regard.

Justice in the Biblical context means justice to the poor and oppressed. It can also be said justice is help or salvation to the poor. What is justice in the context of women? We know in our country, and throughout the world in general, women are the most widely exploited and the most severely oppressed group in society. Traditional customs and practices still continue to keep the 'woman' in her 'place' and not allow her an equal voice or role in the male dominated society, in spite of the constitutional protection given to her. We know it is no better in the Church. The message of justice of Jesus, 'Set the captives free' speaks directly to us and the church should be the instrument for making this Gospel known to them. As Christian women, we should take it as a challenge not only to speak of God's justice, but also to demonstrate it by taking the side of the oppressed, and

helping them out. Do we know the areas in which women are oppressed and suffer injustice? Do we know of the social customs and religious practices of our areas, which oppress women? Do we know of the unjust personal laws of our country, which are different for different religions and are mostly unfavourable to women? Do we know the problems of child labour? Have we ever thought of the prostitutes and their problems? What is our reaction to the problem of illiteracy and ignorance specially among women? Do we know that this decade 1991 to 2000, is the SAARC decade of the girl child and do we have any concern for the problems of the girl child? As Christian women of the Church of South India, are we raising one little finger to help the oppressed in any one of the above areas? If we want to do anything for them we have to identify ourselves with them, walk side by side, hand in hand with them, to tell them that we are with them to work for justice in the power of Christ. There are several voluntary secular organisations working for social justice in our areas. We, the Church women must join those group in this struggle for justice. Can we do it?

Peace is not just the absence of war. Just keeping quiet and not responding to the acts of injustice is not peace. In the Biblical view, peace is SHALOM, the fullness of life. Peace is the normal condition of God's creation. Genesis tells us that God saw that everything was good when he created it. But conflict is the result of human sin. Man started exploiting woman and the rest of the creation and that ended up in the present state of conflict. We, women have to work for that peace 'SHALOM' and this is our challenge.

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The Role of Women in a Christian Home

MRS. JOSEPHINE AZARIAH, Madras

It is needless to say it is no home if there is no woman at the centre of it. This is what God must have meant when he said to Adam it is not good for him to be alone without a woman and went on to produce women made of bones. Please note Adam himself was made of clay and to make a home with that man, God thought of something even stronger than clay. So the world needs a woman who is stronger in many ways and better than man to make a human family and a home for them. But even a human family and a home for them needed to have better foundations and this was supplied by God through the coming of Christ into this world. He was born in a home, the first Christian home existed two thousand years ago. It was a refugee home not even in the inn or choultry but outside, it was in a cattle shed. It was a Christian Home nevertheless because Christ was present. To help her to become a christian mother Mary had the gift of the Holy Spirit sent by God through His Angels. So to make a Christian Home the following elements are necessary :—

- i. God.
- ii. The Holy Spirit sent by Him.
- iii. Angels from God.
- iv. Christ our Saviour, also sent by God the Father.
- v. A truly good natured husband, a godly man like Joseph.

If one has all these **five elements**, it will make a real good christian home. Doesn't matter what kind of house you live in. It can be a village house like Joseph and Mary had to begin with at Nazareth or it can be choultry or an inn where there was no place for Mary at the time of her fullness for the baby to be born or it can be a cow shed of a house like most of our fellow Christians have in the villages. To make a christian home and family the type of house you can afford is immaterial. It is not *where* you live that matters but *how* you live. Christian family and home therefore can be made or marred anywhere that you may live or reside together with the other members of the family. I have just said the Christian family can

also be marred or that is to say spoilt or ruined, whatever place that family may reside in even if it is a palace or in the slums. This means it is not the *place* but the *persons* that make up Christian Home and the family consisting of the woman, the man and their children. But then to make a Christian Home out of the father, mother and children of any family, all of them and also each of them must be associated with the *five* elements noted earlier by us. I mean to say, each member of a Christian family must be associated personally with:

God, the Father,

God, the Holy Spirit,

God the Son, even Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour who is called Emmanuel — *God with us*.

Fourthly we need the help of the angels from God. I mean to say that no member of the Christian family should associate with the evil spirits but with the good spirits that are angels and fifthly the good natured husband. Well, from the husband's point of view, he wants a good natured wife and both the parents want godly children.

Now my friends, how can we make sure that every Christian family member becomes associated with the above *five* necessary elements that we mentioned above. I suppose we can try and recall some famous Christian families to learn from their example on this matter and then we can pull out some practical methods or ideas which can help us and our families acquire those *five* necessary qualifications.

(i) Of course we already noted the first Christian home was that of the great mother of our Lord, Mary with her first born son Jesus and her magnanimous husband Joseph who knew how to handle all suspicions and doubts about his wife's character in such ways like not directly questioning her or arguing or fighting with Mary but silently taking the matter to the Lord in prayer and the Lord helping him through a vision and voice telling the truth about Mary's condition and character. Then for Mary and Joseph were born *four* boys and probably *two* girls. In Matthew Ch. 13 we are told only the names of the

boys like James who is the writer of the Epistle and was the first Bishop of Jeruslaem; then Josa, then Jude (Author of the Epistle) and Simon. Then they speak about sisters, it should be at least two sisters. So it was a family of seven children and two parents two thousand years ago. Mind you now you cannot afford to have more than two children saying 'We two ours two' not more than that. But big family or small family we only want to make it a Christian family and a Christian home. After all it does not matter *how many* are in the family in the Christian home but *how well* you live together even if it is only just three : husband, wife and child. The basic model is of course the Triune God. There is already a family of three so that they live co-equal, co-substantial, all three in one Oh! don't worry about arithmetics. Love, peace and happiness are matters of relationships and not arithmetics. If you happen to have a large family do not worry, that is not the cause of friction. I know how to feed so many mouths and stomachs is a question of numbers and economics but then if there is trust in God among the members of the family 'Don't worry', says the Lord Jesus, about your food", and asks, does not God the Father feed the birds of the air? Do not worry about your dress or clothing. Does not God clothe all the variety of colourful flowers glamorously?" These are not just words. If you trust in God with a little faith of the size of a mustard, you will see God providing all things, if necessary, through a miracle. Learn to trust in God and also trust in one another in the family. Then you will see ways of finding the needs of the family. The first quality to make a Christian home therefore is **trust** and let us count this as number one among the 5 qualities we need to acquire. I want to use our five fingers to count those five qualities so that we can remember them well every day. Shall we say that the idea of *trust* is connected with the **thumb**. Most obviously trust and all other four essential qualities that make a Christian family were found in the first Christian home of St. Mary.

(ii) You must have heard about Monica the mother of the great St. Augustine. He was a boy full of mischief and even wickedness in the fifth century, living in Northern Africa. But he was a very intelligent young man, very learned compared to all his age group in the town. But Mother Monica was very concerned about his life and future. So must have been his father and other members of the family. But it was Monica who kept on praying for the conversion of her son and shed tears of joy when he was finally converted. The story goes that, he, after travelling to University as a scholar, lecturer, etc., and travelling from town to town all around the Mediterranean sea, Augustine found no peace because of his wicked qualities, all of which he described in his book 'CONFESSIONS'. Such a man shutting himself in a room, struggling to find peace in his heart suddenly heard the voice of God through the children who were playing not

far away from that room. *Take up and read* was the name of the game they were playing. But Augustine had seen mother Monica so frequently taking up the Bible and reading. With no other go but taking those words as coming from God asking him to take up the Bible and read, he obeyed and he read from the book of **Romans** and he was converted and then became the first great theologian of the Church. He himself says his conversion was due to his mother Monica, especially to her habit of Prayer and Bible reading. **Prayer** life then is what I want to fix upon the **pointing finger** as the second great quality that is essential and unavoidable to make up a Christian home and the family.



(iii) The middle finger stands for the quality of **mutuality** which is better than equality that should be among the members of the Christian family, I mean mutual respect for one another : The children's for the parents and the parents love and affection and other qualities showered on the children, patiently bearing their mischief and petty quarrels but training them in obedience and hard and honest work in their studies, not forgetting their growing in the faith with daily practice of Bible reading and prayer. This will help grow mutuality within the family. It is the family of 18 children to the parents of the great John Wesley that comes to my mind as a model of Christian home where mutuality must have reigned supreme during the 18th century in England. It is true Father Wesley was a Pastor, the mother was a devout and pious lady. Even so there must have been quarrels and troubles especially to feed 20 mouths not to speak of the burdens of child bearing of that great mother of Wesley. Surely all the 5 qualities that characterise any truly Christian home were found in the Wesley Home and two of their boys John and Charles Wesley under the spirit of God started a world movement called Methodism. Most certainly their strength and vision came from their great Christian home.

(iv) Most of us put on a gold ring on our fourth finger counting from the thumb. This finger stands for

security, not only economic security and protection of the family but the security of the persons from their childhood without sickness or by recovering from illness and danger and accidents, etc., not to speak of fighting and misunderstanding, sometimes leading to separation, hopefully temporary but tragically in some cases to permanent separation within the family. This can happen even before anybody arrives in the home like mother-in-law. But then not all mothers-in law are bad. The Old Testament tells the story of Naomi but unfortunately such types are not found among Christians frequently. Yet it is possible to overcome in-laws' problems and other problems that divide any home or destroy any family. But overcoming such dangers is possible only with the security that comes from God our refuge and shelter, our patron and protector of the family. Psalms 90 and 91 tell us of the meaning of taking God as our refugee and security. God becomes our umbrella because we are without any break continuing to remember Him and call upon Him in silent prayer and meditation and in our mind and heart. Quietly we can be in touch with God every moment of the day. 'Quietness and rest shall be our strength,' says Isaiah. *Security* then stands for the fourth quality, that must characterise a Christian home and family.

(v) **Fifthly and finally we have the little finger of our hand standing for the quality of LOVE, the central basic gift of God. Romans 5:5 says the love of God is being poured in our hearts by the Holy Spirit. At every**

marriage we have St. Paul's 1st letter to the Corinthians 13th Chapter passage on love read out as message for the newly married couple beginning a Christian home. A wonderful thing about this is that this love comes to us as a free gift from the Holy Spirit but he is already living as a guest in our heart and body in every person and individual. So the measure of our relationship with the Holy Spirit who is the guest within our heart and our body as the temple of that Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) who is to be seen in our relationship with other members of the family in the Church and in the Society. The little finger then stands not only for love as a quality but for loving relationship that should be a practice in our life. This means we must lift at least our little finger to help others in the family everyday to make sure that we have a Christian family. Many examples of Christian families can be given to show love is the central quality that makes up a Christian home. In one's own family to begin with the husband and wife come together because of love and when the children come that is also because of love! Now if we continue to employ love in everything connected with our home life and family life as Christians all will be well! Jesus said, 'As the father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.' (Jn. 15:9). May each of us experience Him as Emmanuel (God with us) in our own family.



Contd. from 2nd page

3. A Believer prepared for Death when he was alive:

It is not common in our society, or for that matter, in any society, that people discuss openly matters related to one's own death and the formalities connected with it. In fact, many of us even try to avoid such thoughts, as if we can escape death by ignoring this last enemy.

While I was in their home, Bishop Lipp was discussing with the local Catholic Priest in whose Parish there is a church cemetery, the matter of procuring and reserving space for him and his wife. Church cemeteries are so few in Germany these days and Bishop Lipp was keen that he and his wife should find an 'eternal resting place' for their mortal bodies near a church. The Church that he served all his life, with such faithfulness, the Church that was very near and dear to his heart in life and in death. He was not one who feared death, but one who prepared himself for death. In fact, the strength of a person's

christian faith can be tested on the degree of one's preparedness to face death. For, our faith is anchored in the resurrection hope. It is founded on the resurrection faith that Jesus Christ our Lord is indeed risen.

The death of His Saints, and the death of this one Saint, Richard Lipp, is precious unto the Lord (Ps. 116:15), Calvin said of this verse, "God does not hold His servants in so little estimation as to expose them to death casually". Each one of us is precious to our God; so is our death.

God gave the German church, the Indian Church, indeed, the universal church, Richard Lipp. We received him and were benefited by his life and his ministry. Our lives have been enriched by him. We thank God for this dear Bishop.

SAM AMIRTHAM
Bishop

Role of Women in Restoring Eco Balance

MRS. FELICITA S. BAILEY, Dharwar

When one looks at the impending Ecological disaster which looms like an ominous cloud threatening to engulf creation, one is forced to acknowledge the guilt of negligence, desecration, exploitation and wanton destruction of nature. The nature which ever since Creation has been nothing less than a mother to us, caring for her children, sacrificing, nurturing and silently tolerant.

In this context I would like to quote from the Bible two contrasting readings. The first reading is from the Book of Genesis Chapter I and verse 29 and Chapter 2 verse 15.

'Then God said, I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food.'

'Then God who asked the man to till the earth also asked him to *keep it and care for it.*'

The second reading is from the Book of Isaiah Chapter 24 verses 4-6.

'The Earth mourns and withers, the world languishes and withers, the Heavens languish with the earth. The earth lies polluted under its inhabitants, for they have transgressed the laws, violated the statutes and broken the everlasting covenant. Therefore a curse devours the earth; and its inhabitants suffer for their guilt. Therefore the inhabitants of the earth are scorched and free men are left.'

In the first reading we see the eternal love of the Creator, in creating the cosmos and handing it over to man; to care, cherish and protect. Therefore the Cosmos is a creating blessing, a matter of joy and celebration over which the Creator appoints man as a steward, a caretaker. God who asked the man to till the earth also asked him to keep it and care of it.

But did man carry out his stewardship faithfully? What is the condition of the Cosmos gifted by God to man today? Has he done justice to the trust God placed in him of taking care of His Creation? The second reading will reveal the answers:

'The earth mourns and withers'. What a profound truth: Today the earth is groaning with the abuses inflicted on it by man. Are we not pushing creation to its last limit? Our greed for wealth, power and material comfort has driven us to slander nature; to loot the earth of its glory, and to exploit senselessly, selfishly, unmindful of the future. We hear of global warming, greenhouse effect, oxygen depletion, acid rain, ozone depletion etc. These are all new terms, Ecoterms, which reveal the pangs suffered by the earth.

Emission of gases, accumulation of carbondioxide, industrial effluents, acid rain, drying up of natural courses of water which sustain the earth, have deprived the earth of its inherent strength. The earth's resources have been exploited and exhausted by man. The mighty power of the earth has been weakened because man has treated the Earth as a commodity to attain affluence and dominance over nature.

We talk about global warming, ozone depletion, acid rain etc. But do we really know the manifestations of Ecology? The word Ecology which is derived from the Greek word 'Oikos' literally means 'House or Home or Earth'. What a beautiful thought that the *whole cosmos is nothing but a home!* which man or woman can wantonly slander a home? Is it not a temple to be kept holy?

We women are the makers of a home. It is our duty to keep our homes clean, beautiful, attractive and make it a place of love, peace, justice and integrity. The same applies to the Cosmos which is also our home. Women from time immemorial have been closely and strongly connected with nature. It is not for nothing we have the term 'Mother land'. This shows how land is as venerable as the mother. In the Vedas the woman is symbolised with 'Shakti' or Power and is identified with *Prakriti* which is Nature.

Women are the original and constant companions of nature. They are the fruit gatherers, fuel gatherers and protectors of nature. They are naturally concerned in nurturing and not destroying life. Zeba Ali of Pakistan who works for International Union for Conservation of Natural Resources says 'Women are more susceptible to environmental problems because they are directly linked to these problems'.

Most of us are professionals like teachers, nurses, doctors etc. We can, in our own fields, not only in our homes, but in our places of work, try to spread this Ecovision of the Cosmos as a home. It is not enough to just propagate the planting of trees or preventing their feeling. We should have better Action plans to carry out a crusade against Ecocide. We need to imitate Itwari Devi, Bachini Devi or Hima Devi in a similar context. To carry

out our plans effectively we have to make *Investments*. These could be:

1. Financial Investments.
2. Physical Investments.
3. Intellectual Investments.
4. Land Investments.

First Japanese Woman Priest

Junko Monica Preston, born to an NSKK family, baptized and confirmed in the Diocese of Tokyo, became the first woman of Japanese birth and upbringing to be ordained as a Priest in the Anglican Communion, when the Archbishop of New Zealand, The Most Revd Brian Davis laid hands on her in the Wellington Cathedral of St. Paul on December 5, 1993.

The event was an encouragement to many women and men of NSKK who are working for acceptance of the ordination of women in this Province. Letters of congratulations were sent and communications were opened with this new-found sister.

The Revd Ms. Preston was educated in Tokyo and also attended the University of Michigan in the USA, prior to meeting her husband, a British diplomat. They live in Wellington and she is on the Cathedral staff.

NSKK Newsletter

BOOKS

The brief listing below includes some of the important books, pamphlets and articles on the subject of women in Church and society.

1. COOPERATION OF MAN AND WOMEN IN CHURCH, FAMILY AND SOCIETY by Barot, Madelenre. W.C.C., Geneva.
2. THE SERVICE AND STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCHES by Bliss, Kathlees. SCM Press London.
3. KNOWING WOMAN by C de C, Irene. Hodder and Stoughton, London.
4. ECUMENICAL REVIEW. Volume 27, October 1975. The entire issue is devoted to the Question of women's ministry in the church.
5. WOMEN OF OUR COMPANY by Webb, Pauline Cargate Press, London.
6. WOMEN PRIESTS BY SWIDLER, Leonard and Arlene Paulist Press, New York.
7. ARE WOMEN HUMAN? By Sayers, Dorothy. Eerdmans, Grand Rapids.
8. THE SHALOM WOMAN by Wold, Margaret, Augsburg Press, Minneapolis.
9. THE FUTURE OF PARTNERSHIP by Russell, Letty Westminster, Philadelphia.
10. WHERE ARE THE WOMEN? by Webb, Pauline Epworth, London.

Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women, a Report

REV MISS. IVALEEN AMANNA, *the General Secretary of CSI W.F.*

The Ecumenical Decade of the Churches in Solidarity with Women was launched in the month of April 1988.

There was a synod level committee appointed by the then Moderator The Most Rev. Victor Premasagar. The committee decided to identify six issues to be implemented for the upliftment of women in the Church and society.

1. Domestic Servants.
2. Solidarity in Family life.
3. Widows and elderly people.
4. Bride burning and violence against women.
5. Change of attitude towards women.
6. Pre-school Education.

1. Domestic Servants

The elite women exploit the poor who work in their houses. The information about such incidents, reports and articles had to be collected and there should be solidarity with these workers.

2. Solidarity in Family life

This is one of the objectives of C.S.I. Women's Fellowship. Training programme was suggested to train people to inculcate spiritual, economical, legal, social and cultural development. Family evangelism was also given more importance. Family week was celebrated in the year 1993 in some dioceses.

3. Widows and Elderly people

This is one of the crucial issue in our Indian society. It was decided to commit to create awareness to solve their problems and to help the widows and elderly people by providing social security and peace in their lives.

4. Bride burning and Violence against Women

A change in the attitude should be brought out in the community and specially among the in-laws. Conscientization on the violence against women should be taken up in all the Dioceses of CSI. To create awareness Women's Fellowship should enact role plays, skits and dramas in the worship services on Sundays in the Churches. It was also suggested to have Women's issues Sunday every month and it could be done separately for rural and urban women.

5. Change of attitude and the Violation of human rights

The Women's Fellowship in the Church needs the support to promote justice and to change the general attitude. It was regretted that in Christian community also dowry deaths, harassment and desertion, denial of property rights, bigamy, incidents of rape and ill-treatment of women take place. There is discrimination against women in society. Therefore, the purpose of the Church in declaring the Ecumenical Decade in Solidarity with Women is for adopting a new Church programme which will help:—

- (a) to empower the women to change the oppressive structures.
- (b) to affirm their shared leadership in decision-making in the church and society.
- (c) to give prominence to women's perspectives and actions in their work of justice.
- (d) to promote the participation of women and give equal status at all levels from parish to Synod.

6. Pre-school Education

The members further discussed about the Pre-school Education and specially in the villages among the backward communities.

In connection with the above issues the C.S.I.W.F have 239 Pre-schools. The Pre-schools are providing quality formal education in the areas of literacy, numeracy, science, social environment studies, creative and psychological development. They have brought economic liberation to the mother (and sometimes fathers) and educational liberation to older saplings as these two groups are now able to attend to their own needs while the young ones are at Pre-school. The Pre-schools provide formal and social education through a professionally developed curriculum delivered by trained teachers to children in very needy circumstances mainly in rural areas from families of low income eg., farm labourers, brick makers, quarry workers, beggars etc. Their tasks not only involve teaching but also record keeping, accounts work and report writing.

Many are encouraged nicely and supported by the Presidents/Secretaries of their Regional W.F. Women's Fellowship members have also been of great support through their fund raising and providing prizes, toys, clothes and eatables. Visits to the centres by Bishops, Presidents, Secretaries etc., cannot be under estimated and thanks to those who have responded to the call for support and encouragement in this way.

Priority Grant Projects

There are sixty kinds of Projects run under C.S.I Women's Fellowship. The projects run by women are Typewriting Institute, Tailoring centre, Garment making unit, Toy making centre, Bakery and Confectionary, Old People's Home, Self-awareness programmes etc. The Projects are of great help for women to support their individual and family life. Women gained economic security, social status, skills development knowledge, self-confidence, decision-making ability and a change in position from servant/victim to independent worker with some control over their lives. They could also bring peace and harmony in their family. Priority grant was sanctioned from the Synod to show the Solidarity with Women and for the upliftment of women.

C.S.I. Women's Fellowship Secretariat building

In the year 1993 (11th March '93) the C.S.I. Women's Fellowship and Synod Ecumenical Decade committee of the Churches in Solidarity with Women (1988-1994) meeting was held and the Decade committee fulfilled the C.S.I.W.F. Secretariat building plan. The Moderator of CSI, The Most Rev. Vasant P. Dandin laid the foundation stone for the Women's Secretariat building on 29th November '93. To mark the Ecumenical Decade Ms. Edith Loane, Methodist Women's World Federation President was also invited by the CSI Women's Fellowship. The dream of C.S.I. Women's Fellowship could be accomplished forty five years after the formation of C.S.I.W.F. The importance of women and office is made well known to the Church and society. The building consists of documentation centre, Research centre, Pre-school Office, Priority grant office, translation room (as CSI is spread over four regional languages) etc. The documentation centre is set up to collect information, press clippings, Govt. policies, declarations, statements and orders etc. from all resources. The information should reach the women's groups through small pamphlets in regional languages. It should immediately come out as new letter to share ideas and for a regular communication with all other women.

Publication of Books and the programmes conducted by CSI Women's Fellowship.

The following books on issues of women were published by C.S.I.W.F.

1. Our Beloved Amma Sr. Carol Graham.
2. In the Power of the Holy Spirit.

3. The Woman and her Child.

4. Towards Empowering Women – Skits and role plays.

Bible studies, meetings, seminars, workshops, conferences, consultations, Ecumenical decade celebrations both in the congregational and regional level were held. Joint meetings for women and men, Leadership Training and Synod level Ecumenical Decade meetings were also conducted. The topics were mainly dealt with technological, social and health concerns, ecology, women's issues, legal rights and administration knowledge.

Representation of Women in CSI

The Synod has appointed the General Secretary of CSIWF as the ex-officio member in the Synod. At Diocesan level many Churches have been given 25% representation for women in the committees.

Ordained Women

There are 43 Ordained women in CSI. It is a great achievement of CSI amidst many kinds of problems. Four more women are going to be ordained in this year. They are working in the Parish, hospital, boarding home, schools etc. Joint consultation for Ordained women was conducted with the help of CSI Synod.

Women Workers

There are 208 Women workers in CSI. Women workers mainly work in the villages and slums. They visit the slum and rural areas and conduct Bible school, women's meetings, Sunday schools, VBS ministry etc. Most of them work as Chaplains and teachers. They support some of the Church activities by collecting money through sales, visit the sick, Jail and bereaved families, assist the local churches programmes etc. Area leaders and women workers carry on the work among women to give them spiritual knowledge.

Mid-decade Celebration Programmes

Mid-decade celebration programme has been arranged during this year. The C.S.I.W.F released Easter greeting card to spread the message given to Mary by Jesus. Many were surprised to know that the woman was the first person to see and believe in the resurrected Lord and to spread the Gospel. To mark the mid-decade celebration the CSI women were asked to plant 500 plants in their respective Dioceses and to open ten new Women's Fellowship branches. Leadership Training programmes to the Presidents, Officers of W.F. at the Diocesan level were conducted. Pastor's wives Leadership Training and working women programme are being conducted in CSI. Exchange programmes and network programmes are being strengthened by the centre. Women's Rallies were held in some Dioceses (Madras). Some Dioceses have constructed or had started Women's Fellowship office. There was no such provision before. Women's centre for their different kinds of activities was established.

Churches in Solidarity with Women Mid-decade Reflections

MRS. JULIE LIPP NATHANIEL, *Trivandrum*

"NOT BY MIGHT NOR BY POWER, BUT MY SPIRIT, SAYS THE LORD" (Zachariah 4:6)

This word of the prophet Zachariah was spoken to the Jews in Jerusalem around 520 B.C. Let us briefly recapitulate the situation of that time. The Jews who had been in captivity in Babylon some 50 years were released by the new Persian ruler, Cyrus and allowed to return to Jerusalem. In those years of captivity they had deeply mourned the loss of their homeland, particularly the destruction of their holy city, Jerusalem, and the temple. When they had been given leave to return, they were encouraged to rebuild the temple, but for a number of years no progress had been made. Now the prophets Zachariah and Haggai urged Zerubbabel, the governor of Jerusalem, along with Joshua, the High priest, and the leaders of the community to take up the task afresh, we must remember that Zachariah was speaking to the remnant of a people who had been 'plundered by the nations' (ch. 2:8). There would have been those amongst them who had a living memory of their city and its temple being ransacked and levelled to the ground by the might of the Babylonian army. They were a weak people who had been subdued, subjected and humiliated by the super-power of the day. To them Zachariah holds out the promise of a Jerusalem rebuilt around the sanctuary the dwelling of God. In fact, the vision of Zachariah goes so far as to see Jerusalem as the centre from which salvation will extend to the whole world. All this would come about not by the use of temporal power, show of force or subjugation of the weak by the strong. God who was faithful to his covenant with his people would once more take up his dwelling amongst them. He would restore Judah's self-respect among the nations, and in being obedient to the call to restore the temple and purify the worship, the whole community would experience a renewal and strengthening of their unity. 'Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord'.

Now what is the nature of the power referred to here? It is power which is exercised at the expense of others, power which is arrogated to oneself at the cost of putting others down. The strength of the one or the few is most often achieved at the cost of oppressing the majority. Much oppression goes unheeded or is taken for granted. It no longer strikes one as being oppression. It

is merely a matter of keeping certain people or categories of people in their place in order that a few others can hold on to position, status, privilege or money power. Convincing biological, sociological, political and even theological arguments and structures are set up to keep the status quo. Many examples come to my mind. There is the caste-system; there are the many prejudices working against the mentally and physically handicapped; they are the age-old paternalistic structures keeping women in their place and that inevitably means a lower place.

As we have reached the half-way mark in the Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, I wish to reflect on the position of women in the church and society as we find it, but more particularly on what the biblical vision for a community of women and men is.

What is a woman's place? Her place is still primarily in the home bearing children and bringing them up. It befits women to obey their husbands and be silent in the church. And is it wrong to say that still the worth of a woman is assessed largely in terms of the dowry she brings at the time of marriage?

I am not saying that these are all roles which women should not accept. The importance of the mother in the nurturing of children cannot be underestimated. And where would the church be without the women who uphold it with their prayers, through the giving of their time, their talents their devotion and their money, through their faithful attendance and many other ways? But how much recognition is afforded to these important roles.

We must think in terms of the areas from which women have been excluded. They have largely been kept out of the sphere of public activity, of making decisions and sharing power along with men. In the secular sphere women have come a long way in holding responsibilities even at top levels. But how is it in the church? Where are the women in the decision-making bodies or in the ministry of the Word and the Sacrament? Are they not being kept in their place still? True, token steps have been taken, but by and large, often in the name of tradition or a debatable theological position, power and influence are being protected at the expense of women.

Yet, is this the community which God wants? The community of the people of God is not built on hierarchies in which a few hold on to power and the large fold is held in obedience. No, God wants a radically different community. We may ask, how can such a change come about? It will certainly not come by the use of force; it can only come by a change of heart which the Spirit of God gives.

Now, it would be wrong to think that God's Spirit has nothing to do with power or to identify it with weakness. The symbols in the Bible associated with the Spirit of God are wind and fire, nature's most forceful elements. The contrast is not between power and passiveness, but in the nature of the power. It is a power that is totally different from the power we humans strive for and have perfected. It is a power that does not exist or grow by withholding power from others. Rather it is a power which shares itself with the weak, the oppressed, those kept down. The Spirit of God *em-powers* those who are weak, *en-ables* those who are dis-abled and *lifts up* those who are low.

Let us look at some familiar texts in the Bible which further make it plain how the Spirit of God acts, to whom he/she will be given and what he/she will set in motion.

In the book of the prophet Joel ch. 3:1 we read: 'I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and daughters will prophesy and your old people will dream dreams. In that time I will pour out my Spirit on your sons and daughters'.

In the Acts of the Apostles ch. 2:14-36 Peter in his mighty sermon on the day of Pentecost quotes this passage to show that God's promise had been fulfilled on that day by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. All those assembled were witness to the fact that "the sons and daughters and the old people—all had the empowering gift of the Spirit given to them. And those on whom the Spirit came experienced a great transformation, not only on that day. They were united into a community which had "all things in common". There was a *common unity*, manifested in the spirit of sharing. Those having possessions gave to those without; they looked for the things they had in common, what united them, striving for equality rather than hierarchy.

In Luke ch. 2 we read how the angel who visits Mary tells her: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you". Mary was one such daughter who experienced in a very special way the empowering of the Holy Spirit. For her God had reserved the unique role of being mother to the son of the God. When she meets her cousin, Elizabeth, the song of praise and prophecy bursts forth: "He who is mighty has done great things for me; he has shown strength with his arm." This strength of almighty will scatter the proud

and put down the mighty. It will lift up those of little account and those that are hungry will be filled, whilst the rich will be sent away empty. What revolutionary words in the mouth of a young girl who has *traditionally* been depicted as meek and mild! Mary had a *vision* of the new order which the Messiah was to proclaim.

But where are the signs of that renewed community, even within the Church let us again concentrate on the position of women.

In the years 1986/87 the World Council of Churches in Geneva took stock of what the churches had done to improve the lot of women. The findings were very sobering. Traditionalism in theology and practice and prejudices acted as rigid barriers preventing any significant move to change the status of women. Within the church structures those who had the power of making decisions were quite happy that women continue to be the pillars of the church as long as they remain pillars — silent and static.

Confronted by these findings, the WCC chalked out a plan of action in which the churches world-wide would focus attention on womens' issues over a ten year period. For centuries women have been in solidarity with the church whilst remaining marginalised themselves. In 1988 an "Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women" was proclaimed. The half-way point has been crossed. It is time to review what has been achieved and to resolve the steps that should be taken in the next five years.

Women in the CSI can say with some satisfaction that they have taken up the challenge to be in greater solidarity with their more unfortunates sisters and to strengthen the position of women in the church. In addition to the traditional areas of womens' work in the church, new tasks have been undertaken. A big emphasis has been put on educating women, not only to fulfill their roles as wives and mothers better, but to help to be economically more independent, to help them understand their rights and responsibilities in the society. Seminars and workshops focussing on womens' rights and the laws protecting these, on family counselling, on understanding and dealing with the problem of alcoholic husbands have been given importance. Legal aid has been made available to women, and innovative self-employment schemes have been developed coupled with instruction on methods of small savings and assistance in obtaining government loans.

Women in the church have also begun to move into the sphere of organising themselves in a bid to eradicate social evils. This is an area in which the secular womens' movements in India have been very bold with Christian womens organisations keeping in the background. But Christian women have been coming into the open more.

One of the main calls of the Ecumenical Decade is to bring women into equal participation and equal representation in the churches' structures. What a long and painful process it has been and still is to accept women into the ordained ministry. In my country, Germany, now almost half of all theological students are women. It is very common for a woman to be in full charge of a big congregation. While we were on furlough in the summer of 1992, the first woman bishop in the Evangelical Church in Germany was consecrated. But the first generation of women pastors is still alive, and they carry with them the memory of their struggle for recognition. Till today women in the church in Germany feel they are facing an uphill task to gain equal recognition. Here in India women have realised that training for leadership will take them a long way on the road towards greater participation in decision-making in the church.

All these are important steps but they are just a beginning. And where do we go during the next five years? First and foremost, we should get the men in the church to join us, we need our brothers in Christ. Together we should identify, tackle and work through the many remaining conscious and unconscious barriers in the way of a full participation of women. And why should this not be possible, if we do not put the interests of gaining power for its own sake or holding on to it first?

For us women the struggle should not be to take over the power from men. We should not be motivated by vengeance or the spirit of : 'now it is our turn; men have had the say long enough. Let us show them that we can make a better job of it. This has been the tendency with some feminist movements, especially in the West. Women are not the better species of humans. But they do have their own special gifts which they should be allowed to contribute to every sphere of the life of the church and the society. God has created us, man and woman, in his image, Man in himself is not self-sufficient. God gave him a partner, a counterpart and together they were given dominion over his creation.

It is the common task of men and women in the church to enable one another and to empower others, together to lend our voice to the voiceless, to represent those down trodden, to use our power to empower the weak and the oppressed. The challenges that face us are daunting, but we have the promise of God's Spirit who will work great things if we allow him/her to empower us. God's Spirit can create a new community of men and women, together seeking to be the new creation and living to show forth God's kingdom in our world of today, our society, our church and our families.

Scriptures offer readers choice of 2062 languages

LONDON—The Scriptures were translated into 44 new languages last year, bringing to 2062 the number of languages in which at least one book of the Bible can be now read.

The Bible or portions (a portion is at least one book of the Bible, according to the definition of the United Bible Societies) can now be read in 587 African languages, 513 Asian languages, 358 central and Latin American languages, 341 Pacific languages, 189 European languages and 71 North American languages. Portions can also be read in three 'constructed' languages.

However there is more translation to be done as, according to UBS, there are 6000 languages spoken throughout the world.

The complete Bible is available in 337 languages.

UBS libraries in New York, US, and in Cambridge, UK, receive new translations and keep records of languages available.

(EPS)

Women in Dialogue

This is the text of message from a conference entitled "Women in Dialogue: Wholeness of Vision towards the 21st Century" which was held at the Ecumenical Institute, Chateau de Bossey, Switzerland, from 29 April-8 May 1994.

We have gathered as women to envision a just future in church and society, for women, for children, and for men. Much threatens such a future. To create it will be hard work. For the majority of women on earth, this is first of all the hard work of survival.

We have gathered to begin envisioning the 21st century, by letting the light of our lives' stories shine, even with the fires of tribulation;
by celebrating our diversity and honouring our differences, even when they led to conflict; and
by committing ourselves to act together for a just future, even when we are divided by economic, political, cultural, and religious structures and beliefs.

We are united
by our solemn rejection of the pervasive, growing violence against women in the whole world;
by our hope in the freedom born of faith in Mary's son, Jesus; and
by our desire for a new, whole community of human beings, earth, and all creatures, within the embrace of God.

We have had a foretaste of the church of the future in our daily worship together. Celebration, local diversity, local ways of prayer and music, mutual conversation about Scripture — in meditation and praise we were one community embodied in our diversity and worshipping God, the Source of Life.

We are women from islands and all continents, from 33 countries. We are young and more aged women. We are members of churches in Anglican, Roman Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant communions. We do our daily work in many ways: as spiritual directors, teachers, mothers, priests, professors of theology, activists for women's rights, journalists and many other ministries of daily life. We have been gathered by the Ecumenical Institute at Bossey and the women's programmes of the World Council of Churches, the World Alliance of Reformed Churches, the Lutheran World Federation, and the Conference of European Churches. We have been inspired by hearing stories of women's struggles for justice in church and society. The

struggles for food, health, education, political freedom, work, bodily integrity have been women's lot for thousands of years. We envision a future in which survival is not an impossible hope for millions of human beings.

We search the Bible and our traditions for signs of hope and resources for change to envision the 21st century as a new millennium of well-being for women, children, and men. We have heard reports on the progress and struggles of women in the Caribbean, Australia, Latin America, Africa, Asia, Europe, North America, and the Pacific region. In our conversations we realized the need to call women's action and reflection as Christians by a variety of names. This theology is womanist for African & American women. It is women's liberation theology for many in Latin America and Africa. For others it is feminist theology. Latinas in the United States call it *mujerista* theology. For Orthodox women, some call themselves feminist, while others are women reflecting on the theological tradition of Orthodoxy. For many women theology is the action and reflection on work in popular movements. Whatever the name, we are all creating women's reflection on and committed action with God in the world. By whatever name, we are women who commit ourselves to the daily struggle for the survival and well-being of those who live in the world as female human beings and for a just world for all people and other creatures.

In theological reflecting we discover long-hidden aspects of scripture and tradition which empower us, and we reject long-highlighted aspects which degrade us as women. We rejoice in theology which celebrates our female embodied selves as good creation. We reject theology which ignores or defends suffering which is imposed on us and models of sacrifice which reinforce violence in family, community, and nations.

We brought our communities to the conference — in language, social customs, histories, etc. We were often enriched by each other's experience. However, we also experienced the agony of racism in our conference, as the global culture of whiteness overwhelms other cultures, peoples and individuals. Repenting of racism is essential for those who benefit from it; conversion to the struggle against racism and restitution are required for reconciliation with those who are harmed by it.

In the churches more and more women are engaging in theological interpretation of sexuality. We envision a future in which sexuality and violence will no longer be linked. Incest, rape and battering will be no more. Sexual harassment and male privilege will be over. Customs and rituals which endanger the health and rights of women will be eliminated. Violence against lesbians and gay men will be no more. Prostitution and sex tourism will have disappeared. The sexual abuse of children will be no more. The abuse of power through sexuality will be absent from clergy, counsellors and all professionals. Economic necessity will no longer compel women to sell themselves nor to be sold. Marriage will be a mutual, equal, free commitment for those who choose it or receive it as a gift from God. Women will be honored, whether single, in relationship, married, divorced, widowed, in religious orders, mothers, yearning to be mothers. All women will be honored and appropriately supported in public policy, economic structures, cultural values and theology. Incarnation as sexual beings (men and women) will be celebrated with delight and dignity.

We confess that some of us benefit from local, national and global structures which sap the life-blood from gasping peoples, especially women and children. Governments are pressured to "adjust" structures of society to meet requirements of international organizations which control the economic resources of the world. Traditional programmes for social welfare are replaced by privatization and market competition for resources required to meet basic human needs. This inevitably results in exclusion of millions of children and women and men from access to adequate health services, food, education, transportation, and possibilities of life-sustaining work. Such policies also wreak havoc with local and global environments and endanger the survival of the complex organism called Earth.

Halfway through the Ecumenical Decade of the Church in Solidarity with Women, we on the churches to join us in envisioning and acting for a new century. We call on the churches to:

- ♣ place women's survival and well-being at the centre of the programmes for social justice;
- ♣ give women access to all decision-making power in the church and to further this access in society, working with women to exercise power in non-abusive, non-dominating ways;
- ♣ engage in dialogue and critical analysis of the economic, cultural and political context of each church's life and to take appropriate action to combat injustice and to affirm life-giving elements in this context;
- ♣ work to eradicate the abuse of power and sexuality within the church, especially by clergymen and other church professionals;
- ♣ urge each other and especially the churches in Eastern Europe to participate fully in the Ecumenical Decade;
- ♣ reject violence as a solution to ethnic, political or religious differences, especially in the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and wherever religions have been used or misused to fan the flames of hatred; and
- ♣ to review the ongoing theological reflection and action of the churches to eliminate teaching and structures which prevent women from living the full meaning of our baptismal equality.

We know that in our hearts, minds, bodies that in these calls to our brothers and sisters nothing less than the survival of millions of girls and boys, women and men is at stake. The promise of abundant life for all is our concrete hope for the 21st century. The struggle to realize this hope is the action through which we aspire to live our faith.

(EPS)

Women's Fellowship, North Kerala

MRS. VIOLA KURUVILLA, Shoranur

Library at Vaniyam Kulam : Library that was opened a year ago with about 100 books is faring well. In fact it has become a centre place of meeting people of all sections. It attracts youth more who are getting the reading habit. New books are being added time and again. Maggi Isaac is looking after the library. Here is also an opportunity to provide Christian Literature to the public.

This library was inaugurated by Rev. Dass Babu, the Director of the Communications Department.

VELCOM : After having been motivated by the VELCOM programme, the local congregation has taken up a novel programme to help the poor people of the community. The Women's fellowship of the Congregation collected money from its own members and with it they purchased chicks. These cleric were supplied to the poor who rear them and in a few months time they grow up to a saleable size. These bring some definite income to the people. When they receive substantial profit they help the other people. Though simple, it is one of the viable programmes.

Creche : A creche was recently opened with 88 Children — most of them are being the children of the poor parents who belong to the other faiths. It is hailed as a symbolic expression of Christian love and concern for all people. Prema is incharge of this creche.

Community Health Guides : There is a small colony of 20 houses. Shantha John who was trained by the Council for Healing Ministry is doing good service in this colony which, by and large has been out of the purview of any medical agency. Local congregation is planning to train some more such guides who would extend the medical care to many other neglected pockets in this area.

Pre-School : Local congregation offers every possible cooperation to run this pre-school with Sheba as the teacher. There are about 25 children now who are looked after well by the teacher. They get mid-day meal and personal attention.

Regular Bible classes and studies are also being conducted by the presbyter. Once in a month the president of women's fellowship would visit all these places and supervise the work.

Book Reviews

W.C.C. PUBLICATIONS
THROUGH THE EYES OF WOMAN
Wendy Robins, ed.

Prepared by members of the YWCA around the world, these Bible studies focus on refugees and migrants, women and work, women and their bodies, health and environment, justice and peace. The first edition of this book was published in 1986. Here is a totally revised edition. *'(It) is designed to be used with great flexibility ... from a methodological point of view the guidelines offered for conducting the study groups are both simple and creative ... Such a book, I believe, could revolutionize conventional Bible studies. I would strongly recommend it.'* (Missionalia)

Ofelia Ortega, ed.
WOMEN'S VISIONS

Theological reflection, celebration, action

Over the past two decades theological reflection by women has enriched the ecumenical encounter with a wealth of new perspectives and insights — sometimes controversial, always challenging. What those who are undertaking this theological reflection share is a commitment to reread Scripture and Christian tradition in the light of the experience of women. Not surprisingly, therefore, the theology they are doing is as diverse as the contexts and traditions around the world in which women today live and struggle for survival, justice and wholeness. In this new collection of essays some of the most creative women theologians from different countries, cultures and confessions offer their views.

— W.C.C.
Geneva

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FORTHCOMING

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2. Bharatidasan's House of Darkness—trans. by M.L. Thangappa
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4. Sadhu Kochukunju—Mathew Daniel
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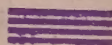
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